

Transportation Challenges for ECO Regional Connectivity

By: Waqas Waheed Malik

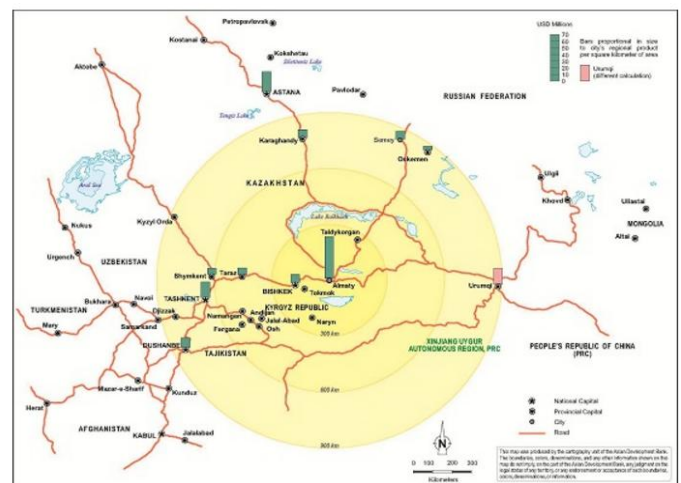
The 13th ECO Summit in Islamabad on 1st March, 2017 was held with a slogan of “vision 2025” to re-enforce the initiative of “Connectivity for Regional Prosperity”. The whole summit revolved around the idea of exploitation of resources for optimal growth in the field of transport, communication, trade and investment. Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) as an intergovernmental regional organization was established in 1985 by Iran, Pakistan and Turkey for the purpose of promoting economic, technical and cultural cooperation among the Member States. In 1992, the Organization was expanded to include seven new members, namely: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Republic of Azerbaijan, Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Republic of Uzbekistan.

The ECO region is full of trading and connectivity prospects. Although the organization is struggling with respect to realization of its objectives and goals and the region lacks trade and cooperation friendly environment due to

overlapping rather competing strategic and political interests of regional and global powers.

The Organization is seeking to develop appropriate infrastructure and institutions on priority basis to make full use of the available resources in the region. In order to accelerate the pace of regional development through common endeavors, the member states have been able to use the existing infrastructural and business links to further fortify their resolve to transfer their hopes and aspirations into a tangible reality. ECO has embarked on several projects in priority sectors of its cooperation including energy, trade, transportation, agriculture and drug control.

Economic Densities in Select Cities in Central Asia*

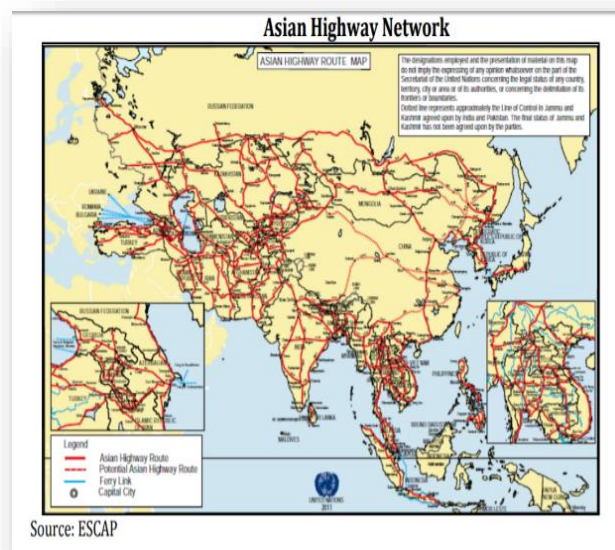


ECO has a remarkable potential for boosting regional and extra regional connectivity. The central geopolitical location of ECO members can act as an important bridge between this region and other regions of the world. All the ten member states of the ECO are members of the organization of Islamic Conference (OIC).

The Caucasian and Central Asian member states of ECO have many deep economic links with Russia and with the Commonwealth of Independent States CIS, with whom they share lines of economic communication and population intermingling since the Soviet era and beyond. All those countries are members of Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe OSCE. Three ECO countries Pakistan, Turkey, and Kyrgyzstan are full members of World Trade Organization WTO. Turkey by itself is a bridge between Asia and Europe, it is also a member of NATO, the EU Custom Union and an associate member of the EU. Pakistan is a member of the SAARC and can also provide easy access to Africa.

In ECO region, development of transport sector for regional cooperation assumes greater dimension as seven out of its ten member states are landlocked countries and remain dependent on transport for developing their economies. The high transport costs have been negatively impacting their imports as well as making their exports expensive. The development of transport system in ECO region is most important in creating supportive infrastructure to ensure integration of

the economies of the member states with countries beyond ECO region. Inter-country land transport linkages are particularly underdeveloped in ECO region. In recent decades, however, governments across the region have made considerable efforts to extend national road and railway systems, both within their countries and by connecting to their neighbors.



So far, much of the investment has been directed into the road sector. Governments have invested in major national roads, as well as rural road networks. The Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network, adopted under the auspices of Economic and Social Commission on Asia and Pacific established technical specifications for the regional road network. The Asian Highway Network now extends through 32 States and comprises 142,000 km of highways. However, there are still 11,500 km of Asian

a member of Pak-China economic bloc. This development will result into a potential power realignment that will frame the “game changer” status of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to “scenario changer”. In this regard, Pakistan is following the balance of power theory while prioritizing the open diplomacy techniques that could further maximize its national interests.



Regardless of resilient apprehensions of India, association of Russia with China and Pakistan is increasing and expanding. In 2014, Russia lifted its self-imposed arms embargo on Pakistan and signed a momentous military cooperation deal with Pakistan. This deal was done in the framework of exchanging information on political and military matters, consolidating alliances in the defense and counter-terrorism sphere, as well as sharing similar understandings on developments in Afghanistan and doing business with each other. Under this deal Pakistan will receive Russian made Mi-35M combat helicopters as well as importing the Klimov RD-93

engines for its JF-17 multi-role fighters. This indicated the substantial role of Russian equipment and spares in future advancement of jet fighter.

On the other hand, China-Pakistan strong relationship is the most imperative bond of Russia-China-Pakistan triad. Pakistan and China has historical alliance and China always supports Pakistan at every international forum. Pakistan is the largest importer of Chinese manufactured defense equipment and has facilitated in coproduction and development of JF-17 fighter jets. Similarly, the immense ventures of China inside Pakistan through China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has made Pakistan an advantageous destination for the international community. Most of the countries as well as Russia might join the CPEC project to boost this alliance and hence resulted into a greater shift in international relations.



The ongoing engagements between China, Russia and Pakistan transpired due to the shift in

geo-political and geo-strategic settings along with growing inter-regional economic projections. The emergent threats to regional stability have navigated the China, Pakistan and Russia to define a new age of coalition. Russian approach in the contemporary world politics has primarily emphasized on the geopolitical veracities of the region, such as, containing drug trade in Afghanistan, strengthening relationship with Pakistan because of its geostrategic importance, preventing the emergent threat of IS and the excess of Taliban insurgency from Afghanistan to Central Asian states and to its own terrains. In this regard, Russia needs a long-lasting relationship with Pakistan which eventually resulted into the realignment of the Pakistan-China-Russia triad. This counter-productive move by Russia transform the scenario of South Asian region and brings Pakistan in the center stage as a significant player.

Indo-Israel Nexus: Changing Strategic Stability Equation

By: Saman Choudary

The Indo-Israeli nexus is further strengthening as India and Israel are entering into a joint deal for development of medium range surface-to-air missiles (MR-SAM) that would further cater to the needs of Indian Army Forces. The Missile Defense system will be jointly developed by Indian DRDO and Israeli Air Craft Industry in order to plug gaps in air defence, as the medium range surface to air

missile can shoot down enemy aircraft, drones, surveillance aircraft and AWACS planes, having a strike range between 50 km to 70 km in the sky. This deal is expected to be pegged at around Rs 17,000 crores for five regiments of the missile consisting of 200 pieces having a range of 50-70 km.



Further, on the Western border, India is also deploying Israeli SPYDER air defence missile system having a range of 20 km. SPYDER constitutes RAFAEL's air-to-air missiles (I-Derby active missile, Python-5, and a dual waveband Imaging Infra-Red missile). The air force aims to boost its readiness to strike down any aerial threat from Pakistan. The SPYDER is a much more modern and resilient system. Along with the Aerostats, SPYDER will significantly enhance the air defense available to ground formations. This system will provide quick reaction air defence protection against adversary aircrafts and UAVs.

Spyder-SR™ / MR™
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These developments indicate that both states are consolidating their strategic partnership and the strategic dimension of Indo-Israeli relations is evolving at a rapid pace. The Air Defence of India is in the phase of development and modernization and Israel is a major player that is helping India in the field of accuracy and technology transfer of weaponry followed by Russia. These defense deals and equipment acquisition will build stronger and positive bilateral relations. Apart from defense deals, Israel is also helping India to provide intelligence on terrorism related issues and both parties are working to further strengthen this domain of cooperation.

Keeping in view the recent trends among Indo-Israel partnership, Pakistan should also re-evaluate its policy options as India is seeking an edge over its traditional rival Pakistan, specifically in terms of air defense and modernization of weapons. Pakistan should work on to recognize Israel as a potential strategic partner in order to achieve equilibrium and balance in the region. This

policy option could yield fruitful results to Pakistan providing a leverage in complex triangular relationship of India, Israel and Pakistan.

Overview

America's War for the Greater Middle East: A Military History

From the end of World War II until 1980, virtually no American soldiers were killed in action while serving in the Greater Middle East. Since 1990, virtually no American soldiers have been killed in action anywhere else. What caused this shift? Andrew J. Bacevich, one of the country's most respected voices on foreign affairs, offers an incisive critical history of this ongoing military enterprise, now more than thirty years old and with no end in sight.

During the 1980s, Bacevich argues, a great transition occurred. As the Cold War wound down, the United States initiated a new conflict—a War for the Greater Middle East—that continues to the present day. The long twilight struggle with the Soviet Union had involved only occasional and sporadic fighting. But as this new war unfolded, hostilities became persistent. From the Balkans and East Africa to the Persian Gulf and Central Asia, U.S. forces embarked upon a seemingly endless series of campaigns across the Islamic world. Few achieved anything remotely like conclusive success. Instead, actions undertaken with expectations of promoting peace and stability produced just the opposite. Consequently, phrases like “permanent war” and “open-ended war” have become part of everyday discourse.

